

Northeast Fisheries Observer Program Policies

Observer Performance Monitoring, Review, Probation and Decertification

Monitoring Data Quality:

The Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) holds monthly Data Quality (DQ) meetings to review all aspects of the programs data quality. One of the key elements of these meetings is for the Data Quality Lead, Data Editors and various NEFOP staff to discuss performance of individual observers. Editors summarize observer data quality, including submission errors, communications, timeliness, and following sampling guidelines. Their feedback is presented to the Data Quality Lead for review and discussion.

Pre-Probation:

If the Data Quality Lead finds that there are significant issues with the performance and/or data submitted by an observer, s/he will provide to the Area Leads (Northeast and Mid-Atlantic) and the Operations Coordinator a written record of the issues and recommend that the individual be monitored for probation (pre-probation). Reasons for pre-probation could include: poor data collection, not understanding nor adhering to NEFOP protocols, and not contacting their editor in a timely manner. The Data Quality Lead will refer their findings in writing (e-mail) to the Branch Chief who will then submit the memo in writing (e-mail or letter) to the Observer Contract COTR to ensure that the Program Manager, Area Coordinator(s), and the observer are notified of the issues and concerns. At this time, the observer will discontinue trips until they are notified by the Data Quality Lead. Additionally, the observer will be required to attend an in-person debriefing at Falmouth Technology Park or an alternative agreed upon location. The observer will be required to take two pre-probationary trips. After each trip, the observer will have to wait to continue to take anymore trips until they have been debriefed by their editor. The Data Quality lead will send an e-mail to the Program Manager and the Area Coordinator when the observer is approved to continue. If there is no discernable improvement in the observer's performance within the first two trips after they have been notified of their pre-probationary status, probation will be recommended. The observer's pre-probationary trips will not be coded as training trips in the database. The two pre-probationary trips should take place within 2 months after the observer has been informed of their pre-probationary status. Situations that cannot meet these criteria can be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Probation:

If probation is recommended, the Data Quality Lead will provide a written memo to the Area Leads (Northeast and Mid-Atlantic) and the Operations Coordinator explaining why the observer is recommended for probation. The Branch Chief will be notified who will then in turn, notify the Observer Contract COTR, the Program Manager, and the observer

of his decision of the probationary action, in writing.

An emergency probationary may be invoked at anytime if there was reason to believe some egregious violation of procedures or protocols had been committed. This action will be carried out by the Branch Chief following discussions with Area Leads, the Data Quality Lead, and/or the Operations Coordinator. The Branch Chief will notify the Observer Contract COTR, the Program Manager, and the observer of his decision in writing. Typically this is a short term probation pending an investigation as to the nature of the offense and may result in decertification.

Once the Program Manager is made aware that the observer will be placed on probation, the Data Quality Lead will contact the observer to inform him/her of the decision. Once notified that s/he is on probation the observer shall cease conducting trips and schedule a debriefing at Falmouth Technology Park, or other agreed upon location. Prior to this meeting, a performance plan will be developed that will summarize the major issues the observer must improve upon before the end of their probationary status. It will also entail what types of trips (i.e., gear types and trip duration) the observer should go on. After the debriefing, three trips will be planned. Each individual trip must be completely reviewed and approved before the observer deploys on successive trips. If these three trips are deemed acceptable, the observer may continue taking trips in the standard manner, but will remain on probationary status for 3 months (or a minimum of 30 observed days, whichever is achieved first). An observer may be kept on probationary status for a longer period of time at the discretion of the Data Quality Lead.

Once an observer is placed on probation he/she will not be eligible for the bonus during that quarter and their trips will be treated by the NEFOP as a priority trip for editing. The observers probationary trips will also be coded as they were intended (not training trips) in the database.

Decertification:

If there is no improvement in the observer's performance during the three probationary trips, or at any time during the 3 month probationary period, the observer will be decertified by the Branch Chief. Decertification will be communicated by written notification to the Observer Contract COTR, the Program Manager, and the observer.

An observer will be decertified, regardless if they have been on probation or not, who fail to abide by the established standards of conduct and conflict of interest, or whose performance is determined to be unsatisfactory.

An observer will automatically be decertified for failure to conform to the Standards of Conduct signed during observer training. An observer will be decertified if they falsify data. Falsification is defined as: *The act of deliberately or knowingly fabricating data collected during observed fishing trips, this includes intentional recording of inaccurate data, intentional omission or deletion of data, intentional plagiarism, or, in general, the*

selective alteration of data. The decertification procedure is subject to appeal in writing from the observer to the Branch Chief. The Branch Chief's determination of decertification is final. Decertification for data quality reasons would disqualify an observer from re-applying to work with the NEFOP.

Any observers who are decertified will not be considered eligible for the bonus.

Expiration of Certification:

If an individual has not completed a trip as a certified observer in the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program in a one year period, their certification will expire. To become recertified, a full three week NEFOP training is required.